Ireland's "Imponderable Dividends": A Nascent Cultural Diplomacy Policy in the Postwar Years

Les « dividendes impondérables » de l'Irlande : une politique diplomatique culturelle en formation dans l'après-guerre

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Ireland's "Imponderable Dividends": A Nascent Cultural Diplomacy Policy in the Postwar Years

Abstract: Focusing on Irish and French diplomatic archive material, this article analyses the conditions of the emergence of Ireland's cultural diplomacy in the aftermath of the Second World War. From a diplomatic perspective, the Inter-Party government (1948-1951) marked a major turning point for Ireland. By passing the Republic of Ireland Act, the state officially became a Republic and withdrew from the Commonwealth. As the new Republic strove to achieve international recognition, the Cultural Relations Committee, an advisory board to the Department of External Affairs in charge of furthering the development of cultural relations with other countries was set up. The discussions among diplomats on membership of the Cultural Relations Committee and the topics to be addressed provide an insight into the competing visions of Irish culture and identity at a time of great political change. Finally, this paper gives an overview of the actions of the Committee in its first years of existence and explores the extent to which there was editorial independence in curating and commissioning work.

Keywords: Ireland, cultural propaganda, Cultural Relations Committee, Seán MacBride, Michael Rynne, Con Cremin, Conor Cruise O'Brien.

Résumé: En s'appuyant sur l'étude d'archives diplomatiques irlandaises et françaises, cet article analyse les conditions dans lesquelles, au lendemain de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, l'Irlande entreprend de développer une diplomatie culturelle. Sur un plan diplomatique, les années d'exercice du premier gouvernement de coalition entre 1948 et 1951 constituent un tournant majeur pour l'Irlande. En votant le Republic of Ireland Act, l'Irlande devient officiellement une république et quitte le Commonwealth. Tandis que le pays tente de s'affirmer sur la scène internationale, le gouvernement crée le Cultural Relations Committee, un organisme semi-indépendant rattaché au ministère des Affaires étrangères chargé de promouvoir la culture irlandaise à l'étranger. Si les échanges entre diplomates quant à la sélection des membres de cet organisme et aux actions à mener mettent en évidence des visions discordantes de la culture et de l'identité irlandaises, la diversité des initiatives prises par le Cultural Relations Committee dans ses premières années d'existence permet d'évaluer le degré d'indépendance dont il bénéficiait pour mener son action culturelle.

Mots clés: Irlande, propagande culturelle, Cultural Relations Committee, Seán MacBride, Michael Rynne, Con Cremin, Conor Cruise O'Brien.

Introduction

In the 1948 election, Fianna Fáil, the party which had been in office for the previous sixteen years (1932-1948), lost its dominant position to a coalition of five parties known as the first Inter-Party government. Former chief of staff of the IRA, Seán MacBride, was appointed minister for External Affairs. Ireland's diplomatic relations in this period were strongly marked by the imprint of MacBride's foreign policy priorities.

The latter part of the 1940s is also the period when Irish diplomats and politicians took the measure of the importance of culture in influencing other countries' decisions and defending one's interests, and as such, saw culture as a source of diplomatic power.¹ The new importance that culture was to assume is reflected in the overhaul of the internal structure of the External Affairs Department. The Cultural Relations Division within the Ministry and an external body, the Cultural Relations Committee,² were set up in order to take charge of what leading diplomat and poet Valentin Iremonger³ described as the "organised dissemination of culture".⁴

By giving an overview of Ireland's international status in the aftermath of the Second World War, this paper will first seek to identify the underlying motives for the creation of the Cultural Relations Committee. Based on the study of material from the Irish diplomatic archives, this article will then examine the intellectual and political debates within the Department of External Affairs surrounding the composition of this body and the selection of its members, the functions that it should fulfil as well as the level of control that the Department should exercise over its activities.

The correspondence between the most senior figures who took part in this debate⁵ gives an insight into the hesitations or even the conflicting views as to the role of Ireland's "cultural diplomacy" and what form it should take. In addition, given that France was one of the main targets for the activities of this committee,⁶ this article also draws on French diplomatic archive material to illustrate the

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1. See "Topics suggested by Thomas J. Kiernan [minister to the Holy See] for discussion at Heads of Missions Conference", 13 September 1945, in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, Ronan Fanning *et al.* (eds.), Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 2012, vol. VIII (1945-1948).
 2. This body was initially called the Advisory Committee on Cultural Relations but became commonly known as the Cultural Relations Committee. This article will refer to it as the Cultural Relations Committee.
 3. Valentin Iremonger was private secretary to the minister, Seán MacBride, from 1948 to 1950.
 4. Valentin Iremonger, "Memorandum", 2 August 1947, National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), 366/40/29, available in the online edition of the Documents on Irish Foreign Policy project, document no. 377: <https://www.difp.ie/volume-8/1947/memorandum-by-iremonger/4477/#section-documentpage>.
 5. Namely Michael Rynne, legal adviser to the Department (1939-1950) and then assistant secretary (1950-1954), assistant secretary Cornelius Cremin (1948-1950), and Conor Cruise O'Brien.
 6. "[Un] Comité a été récemment constitué sous les auspices du Ministre des Affaires étrangères, en vue de développer les relations culturelles avec les pays étrangers et notamment avec la France. C'est en notre faveur que cet organisme vient de prendre sa première initiative: il s'agirait d'inaugurer à l'Université de Dublin des cours dont serait chargé un celtisant français appelé à devenir, en quelque sorte, le successeur de M. le Professeur Vendryès" ("Désignation d'un professeur celtisant pour l'université de Dublin – Lettre de M. Ostrorog, Ministre de France en Irlande à Georges Bidault, Ministre des Affaires étrangères", 22 February 1949, Archives diplomatiques françaises, FR MAE 191 QO 15).

differences between the image of Ireland that Irish diplomats thought they should “project” to the world and France’s perception of Ireland. Finally, by examining what aspects of Ireland’s culture and identity the Cultural Relations Committee sought to promote, this article discusses whether the choices made in terms of staffing and model gave sufficient leeway to this body. This paper therefore focuses on the genesis of the Cultural Relations Committee, and does not seek to assess its long-term action which stretched over many decades.⁷

Ireland’s international standing in the aftermath of the Second World War and the need for cultural diplomacy

In the general international context of the intensification of the Cold War, the first two years of the new Inter-Party government (1948-1949) were particularly active in terms of foreign relations. Ireland officially became a Republic, was a founding member of the Council of Europe, lobbied for funding from the European Recovery Program and opened a number of new bilateral missions.⁸

Yet, its network was still only a modest fifteen in total. Its overseas missions were mainly located in Western Europe and North America.⁹ Ireland did not have any missions in Asia or in the Middle-East, nor did it have any representation in the Soviet Union or presence in Eastern Europe due to its reluctance to recognise communist governments. Ireland had been prevented from joining the United Nations by the Soviet Union in 1946, and Ireland refused to join NATO as long as the United Kingdom remained in control of Northern Ireland. Ireland was therefore relatively isolated due to its exclusion from postwar international organisations.¹⁰ This isolation was certainly one of the factors that prompted it to turn to cultural diplomacy.

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7. The Cultural Relations Committee was active from 1949 until 2005, when it was replaced by Culture Ireland. Tasked with promoting Irish arts abroad, Culture Ireland was initially a unit of the Department of Arts, but became an independent statutory body two years later.
 8. Since 1945, Ireland had opened missions in Canberra, Buenos Aires and Stockholm. From 1948 to 1951 it opened a legation in The Hague, a consulate general in Frankfurt and for a short period a consulate in New Orleans. See “Introduction”, in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, Catriona Crowe *et al.* (eds.), Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 2014, vol. IX (1948-1951), p. xviii.
 9. In the 1920s Ireland had opened missions in Washington, Paris and Berlin, as well as consulates and trade missions in Boston, New York and San Francisco. In the 1930s it opened legations in Belgium, Spain, Italy, Canada, Switzerland and Portugal. See Francis M. Carroll, “Ireland among the Nations of the Earth: Ireland’s Foreign Relations from 1923 to 1949”, *Études irlandaises*, no. 41-1, 2016, p. 44-45, online: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/4796>.
 10. “Introduction”, in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. IX, p. xix-xx. For a detailed account of Ireland’s foreign policy in this period, see Michael Kennedy, “The Foundation and Consolidation of Irish Foreign Policy: 1919-45” and Mervyn O’Driscoll, “Multilateralism: From ‘Plato’s Cave’ to the European Community: 1945-73”, in *Irish Foreign Policy*, Ben Tonra *et al.* (eds.), Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 2012, p. 20-53; Elizabeth Keane, “‘Coming out of the Cave’: The First Inter-Party Government, the Council of Europe and NATO”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 2019, 100 years of Irish Foreign Policy, p. 168-190; Joseph Morrison Skelly, “Ireland, the Department of External Affairs, and the United Nations, 1946-55: A New Look”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 7, 1996, p. 63-80.

In a letter sent from Spain – where he had spent the previous six months – and addressed to Prime Minister Éamon de Valera in 1946, Deasún Breathnach,¹¹ a contemporary journalist who contributed to a diversity of newspapers such as *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Press* and *An Phoblacht*, identified the areas in which cultural diplomacy would be instrumental in advancing Ireland's priorities. The first area concerned the “political and national problem of partition”, an issue which would accentuate during MacBride's term of office. Ireland leaving the Commonwealth in 1949 prompted the British Parliament to pass the Ireland Act in June 1949, thereby consolidating the status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.¹² A further reason for which Breathnach believed Ireland should engage in cultural diplomacy was the necessity to rectify “misconceptions about Ireland's neutrality during WWII” and to develop links with the Irish diaspora, in the USA in particular, who also “had to be educated on Irish political problems, attitude during the war”.¹³ Ireland's neutrality was indeed a major preoccupation in the United States at the time and was not understood by the American elite, hence postwar relations with the United States remained tense.¹⁴

Finally, as suggested by Stanislas Ostrorog, the French envoy to Ireland from 1946 to 1951, Ireland's development of cultural diplomacy at the time also reflects the changing outlook following the ministerial transition from de Valera to Seán MacBride, both iconic figures in the development of Irish foreign policy bringing very different dispositions to bear on the foreign policy brief.¹⁵

The internal debates around the creation of the Cultural Relations Committee

In this context, the Department of External Affairs presented a “Memorandum” to the government in June 1947 explaining that the general object “[was] to make the country better known, better understood” and foster a “sense of cohesion and solidarity between our own people and our friends and sympathisers abroad”. “All experience goes to show [the ‘Memorandum’ added] that foreigners who develop

11. “Letter from Deasún Breathnach to Éamon de Valera”, 26 November 1946, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29.

12. “Introduction”, in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. IX, p. xvii.

13. “Letter from Deasún Breathnach to Éamon de Valera”, 26 November 1946.

14. See Michael Kennedy, “The Foundation and Consolidation of Irish Foreign Policy: 1919-45”, p. 30-34; and John Gibney, Michael Kennedy, Kate O'Malley, *Ireland: A Voice among the Nations*, Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, 2019, p. 97-98.

15. “L'Irlande depuis des siècles a vécu dans une sorte d'isolement que tout conspirait à maintenir. L'habitude en était si bien prise que même après la libération, le pays est resté à l'écart, replié sur lui-même, sans grand contact avec le monde extérieur. Par tendance naturelle, M. de Valera favorisait cet état de choses. M. MacBride est d'un tout autre sentiment. Il veut au contraire amener son pays à prendre une plus large part à la vie internationale et ceci dans tous les domaines” (“Création d'un Comité Culturel en Irlande par le Ministre des Affaires étrangères – Lettre de M. Ostrorog, Ministre de France en Irlande à Robert Schuman, Ministre des Affaires étrangères”, 31 January 1949, Archives diplomatiques françaises, FR MAE 191 QO 15).

an interest in a particular aspect of a country's national culture are apt quickly to become generally friendly or sympathetic".¹⁶ In order to cultivate "sympathy and understanding" it was necessary to engage in "cultural propaganda" which "had become a normal government activity in practically every country in the world".¹⁷

Although the use of the term "propaganda" sheds light on the diplomatic drive underlying the wish to develop cultural relations, "cultural propaganda" is a phrase that was used widely at the time by different diplomatic services. For instance, 1940s and 1950s archives from the French Ministère des Affaires étrangères almost systematically use the terms *propagande culturelle* or *propagande culturelle et artistique*, sometimes creating sub-categories such as *propagande musicale*¹⁸ and the activities of the British council were described by British authorities as "cultural propaganda" until the end of the 1940s.¹⁹ "Cultural propaganda", which the "Memorandum" distinguished from "political propaganda" – an activity it considered to be a lot more "suspect"²⁰ – corresponds to what is now called "cultural diplomacy". Whereas "propaganda" is more politically-driven and consists in "unilaterally disseminating information"²¹ to manipulate people's opinions and actions, "cultural diplomacy" uses culture for the advancement of diplomatic interests but entails a greater level of collaboration and reciprocity with other countries.²² Besides, Seán MacBride himself, who also founded the Irish News Agency and the Information Division of the Department of External Affairs to campaign against partition,²³ drew a similar distinction. In a letter relating to the exchange of programmes between Radio Éireann and Radiodiffusion française in 1949, he defined "cultural relations" as "indirect propaganda":

As you are aware we are particularly interested in this Department in the propaganda aspect, especially in connection with the Anti-Partition Movement, but the cultural side would be of great interest to our Cultural Relations people, and as indirect propaganda.²⁴

16. "Memorandum for the Government – Cultural Publicity Abroad – Proposed Establishment of Advisory Committee", 2 June 1947, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29.

17. *Ibid.*

18. "Propagande et information française en Irlande (année 1945) – Lettre de M. Rivière, Ministre de France à Dublin, à Monsieur le Ministre des Affaires étrangères", 28 December 1945, and "De la propagande musicale en Irlande – Lettre de M. Ostrorog, Ministre de France en Irlande à Robert Schuman, Ministre des Affaires étrangères", 12 August 1948, Archives diplomatiques françaises, FR MAE 191 QO 15.

19. Lauriane Simony, *Le British Council en Birmanie entre 1946 et 1967: diplomatie culturelle et stratégies d'influence après l'indépendance*, PhD thesis, université Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2020, p. 27.

20. "Memorandum for the Government...", 2 June 1947.

21. Arguments of Christine Okret, "La construction d'une politique de projection culturelle britannique en France, des années 1930 à 1953", in *Entre rayonnement et réciprocité: contributions à l'histoire de la diplomatie culturelle*, Alain Dubosclard et al. (eds.), Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002, p. 167; quoted in Lauriane Simony, *Le British Council en Birmanie entre 1946 et 1967...*, p. 27 (and translated by the author).

22. Lauriane Simony, *Le British Council en Birmanie entre 1946 et 1967...*, p. 27.

23. See John Horgan, "Government, Propaganda and the Irish News Agency", *Irish Communications Review*, vol. 3, no. 1, January 1993, p. 31-42.

24. "Letter from Seán MacBride to James Everett (Dublin)", August 1949, in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. IX, p. 420.

Interestingly, Ireland's choice in favour of a body distinct from the Department of External Affairs although remaining under its supervision, is a compromise between the French system whose Direction générale des relations culturelles, set up in 1945, remained fully integrated in the Ministère des Affaires étrangères, and the British model, which, as early as 1934, had entrusted the promotion of culture and language to the British Council, an agency separate from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and – at least seemingly²⁵ – more immune to its political objectives.

In January 1949, Seán MacBride thus set in place the Cultural Relations Committee, an advisory body “[consisting] of no less than nine and no more than eighteen people, appointed annually by the Minister for External Affairs” in charge of furthering “the development of cultural relations with other countries and to make available in those countries information on every aspect of [Ireland's] national culture life”.²⁶

Stanislas Ostrorog reported to Robert Schuman, then French minister of Foreign Affairs, that MacBride had initially contemplated creating a division in charge of “cultural propaganda” within the Department of External Affairs, but was concerned that there may not have been sufficient expertise in-house.²⁷ Another reason put forward in the “Memorandum for the Government” is that the structure designed by the Department – which resulted from the comparative examination of the systems of the United States, Canada, France, Sweden or Switzerland – allowed for greater quality and objectivity whilst following a general tendency at the time.²⁸ Nonetheless, while the Irish Foreign Ministry intended to make this Committee free of “conventional limitations that representatives [were] bound to observe”, it provided for flexibility to renew the membership easily, and ensured that some of members of the Committee had diplomatic and public service experience, thereby exercising some control over the body:

It might be well that members should be appointed for a relatively short period at a time. This would have the advantage of familiarizing as many people as possible with the work of the committee, and, incidentally, of enabling people found unsuitable to be dropped.²⁹

Before studying the extent to which the make-up of the Cultural Relations Committee would determine or influence its initiatives in its first years of existence,

25. Lauriane Simony, *Le British Council en Birmanie entre 1946 et 1967...*, p. 26.

26. “Regulations 1949”, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29.

27. “Création d’un Comité Culturel en Irlande...”, 31 January 1949.

28. “Generally, it may be said that, apart from countries like the United States and France in which the activities of public Departments are subject to the scrutiny of legislative committees, the tendency is to rely on a type of organization which, though official, is made more or less independent of the government of the day as a means of guaranteeing the objectivity of the work” (“Memorandum for the Government...”, 2 June 1947).

29. “Memorandum for the Government...”, 2 June 1947.

it is necessary to focus on the conceptual debates which absorbed leading figures of the Ministry as to what kind of cultural activity or what aspects of national life should be promoted, and how this should be done.

The exchanges between Michael Rynne and Con Cremin are instructive in this regard. The note Rynne wrote to Cremin in June 1947 commenting on the proposals set out in the "Memorandum" offers a case in point of the intensity of the diplomatic discussions around the setting up of cultural relations.³⁰ Rynne's views on the task of the Committee are all the more interesting since he was to be in charge of the Cultural Division of the Department as assistant secretary in 1951.³¹

Rynne measured the action of Ireland's "cultural propaganda" in very pragmatic and economic terms and clearly saw the benefit the country could reap from it in terms of soft power.³² Stressing the need to be proactive as well as availing of opportunities, Rynne emphasised the need "to decide what we want to sell and roughly what we want to get in the way of 'dividends'".³³ Yet, Rynne distinguished the case of Ireland from the experience of Sweden and France to which he argued Ireland was hardly comparable, since these countries could rely on a stronger industrial base. By boosting manufacturing or tourist industries, cultural publicity for Sweden or France would generate economic profit.³⁴ The fruit of Ireland's "cultural publicity" on the other hand, would be measured by what Rynne – rather paradoxically – calls "intangibles" and "imponderables",³⁵ that is to say, the "lasting sympathy and understanding"³⁶ other countries may be willing to show towards Ireland.

The "Memorandum" envisaged "cultural propaganda" as covering a wide range of activities but with a clear emphasis on arts: including photographic and film exhibitions; exchanges of students and lectureships; lecture tours; the preparation and distribution of books and publicity material to public and university libraries.

30. "Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin", 25 June 1947, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29.

31. "Letter from Cornelius C. Cremin to Michael Rynne", 14 September 1951, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29. Cornelius Christopher Cremin (1908-1987) first served in the Department of External Affairs as third secretary from 1935 to 1937. He was sent to the Irish legation in Paris as first secretary (1937-1943) and after having served as chargé d'affaires in the legations in Berlin (1943-1945) and Lisbon (1945-1946), he then returned to Dublin with the rank of Counsellor. In 1948 he became assistant secretary, in charge of the Economic and Trade Division, before being posted to the Paris legation as minister plenipotentiary / ambassador to France (1950-1954) replacing Seán Murphy. Cremin went on to become secretary to the Department of External Affairs (1958-1963), ambassador to Britain (1963-1964) and finally ambassador to the United Nations (1964-1974). Michael Rynne (1899-1981) served as assistant legal adviser to the Department of External Affairs from 1932 to 1936, when he became head of the League of Nations Section for the Department from 1936 to 1939. He then became legal adviser to the Department (1939-1950), assistant secretary (1950-1954) and finally ambassador to Spain (1955-1961). See "Introduction", in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. IX, p. xxxi-xl; "Représentation de l'Irlande en France (1950-1954)", Archives diplomatiques françaises, FR MAE 191 QO 20.

32. See Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, Public Affairs, 2004, p. x.

33. "Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin", 25 June 1947.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

Rynne, on the other hand, argued that rather than restricting its action to the promotion of arts and of Ireland's Christian heritage – such as the monastic site of Clonmacnoise and the Book of Kells – the Cultural Relations Committee should also advertise state-of-the-art technological achievements in Ireland such as the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme, the Turf Scheme and Irish Airports. Furthermore, Rynne also argued that the Department should not encourage the promotion of Irish arts abroad. In addition to being “at a rather low level”³⁷ Anglo-Irish literature and drama – i.e. produced by Irish authors but written in English – in particular, could be interpreted as symptomatic of Ireland's cultural “dispossession” by Britain: “Theatrical productions (Abbey and Gate) are not so useful to this country as they are to the English language”.³⁸ The desire to avoid spreading the rather unattractive narrative of a defeated Gaelic nation dispossessed of its culture and language certainly reflects Rynne's concerns as a diplomat at a time when the newly proclaimed Republic was precisely trying to assert its independence and singularity to the world. Rynne's views are redolent of the ideas of the Irish Ireland movement of the first part of the century which claimed that Ireland's Gaelic, Catholic and Rural identity had survived centuries of oppression, and also echo the positions of Fianna Fáil and of de Valera – themselves quite characteristic of newly emancipated countries in the process of reconstructing their identity – for whom promoting both Ireland's ancient cultural heritage and its technological accomplishments, rather than its contemporary artistic output, should help Ireland achieve international recognition as a modern nation.³⁹

The best strategy, Rynne argued, would be to “reach the ‘common man’ abroad”.⁴⁰ While the “Memorandum” recommended that cultural propaganda should target the intellectual and learned classes – “the very people [it said] who, in most countries, are in the best position to influence Press, radio and public opinion”⁴¹ – Rynne contended that supporting and promoting “the few aspects of our national life which are flourishing and which have a genuine interest for the man in the street”, that is to say “the national games, the national dances, and national music” would have the merit of “arousing the interest” of the “plain” people, and not the “fickle intelligentsia (university professors, journalists and diplomatic corps) of other countries”.⁴² To achieve this, the Department of External Affairs should not rely on “the ‘high-brow’ whose appeal to the mass of people at home and abroad is just nil”⁴³ or on universities which are “no credit to this country, being controlled by people who, unfortunately, are in no way typical of the Irish people as a whole”.⁴⁴ The All-Ireland Gaelic Football Championship final which was to take place in

37. “Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin”, 25 June 1947.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Alexandra Slaby, *L'État et la culture en Irlande*, Caen, Presses universitaires de Caen, 2010, p. 40-43.

40. “Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin”, 25 June 1947.

41. “Memorandum for the Government...”, 2 June 1947.

42. “Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin”, 25 June 1947.

43. *Ibid.*

44. “Handwritten note from Rynne to Sheila Murphy”, about the “Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin”, 25 June 1947.

New York in 1947 would on the other hand be a great opportunity to strengthen Ireland's ties with its diaspora by celebrating the centenary of the Irish Famine.⁴⁵ In this respect, Rynne seems to display a form of anti-intellectualism which in the first decades of existence of the Irish Free State permeated a political class whose access to a college education tended to be limited and whose attention had been focused on more pragmatic issues.⁴⁶ All in all, Rynne concluded: "our policy ought to give the foreign public what it wants [...] provided that this is consistent with giving them a fairly correct and really attractive picture of Ireland and its people". In any case, Rynne was determined "not to let the Advisory Committee stand in our way".⁴⁷

Following internal discussions on the "Memorandum", this article will now examine the composition of the Committee at the time of its creation, what vision of cultural diplomacy it espoused, and the margin of independence that was afforded to its work.

Membership of the first Cultural Relations Committee: live-wires or senile types?

The sixteen members originally appointed to the Cultural Relations Committee set up on 27 January 1949⁴⁸ reflect the compromise between the desire to include experts in a variety of artistic domains, to have a number of learned bodies and institutions represented, and also to select personalities who had contributed to the independence of Ireland and the formation of the Free State.⁴⁹

Ireland's Celtic heritage, represented by Séamus Ó Duilearga, director of the Irish Folklore Commission since 1935 and professor of folklore at University College Dublin since 1937, was complemented by the presence of Roger McHugh, the first professor of Anglo-Irish literature and drama at University College Dublin, writer Maura Laverty, academic Eileen MacCarvill and John MacDonagh who had founded the Irish Theatre Company. Thomas McGreevy and Edward Augustine McGuire, were selected for their knowledge of Irish painting, while Richard Hayes, and Liam Ó Laoghaire – a founding member of the Irish Film Society in 1936 – accounted for the growing popularity of the cinema in Ireland since the 1930s.⁵⁰ Architecture was included through the figure of Michael Scott, who had designed the Irish

45. "Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin", 25 June 1947.

46. Alexandra Slaby, *L'État et la culture en Irlande*, p. 40-47.

47. "Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin", 25 June 1947.

48. *Cultural Relations Committee, Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland: 50 years*, Dublin, Cultural Relations Committee, 1999.

49. The Cultural Relations Committee was originally made up of: Mr. Justice Gavan Duffy (chairman), Senator Michael Hayes (vice-chairman), Séamus Ó Duilearga (Delargy), Richard Hayes, Maura Laverty, Senator Patrick McCartan, Eileen MacCarvill, John MacDonagh, Roger McHugh, Thomas McGreevy, Senator Edward Augustine McGuire, Josephine McNeill, T. W. Moody, Liam Ó Laoghaire, Richard "Mac" O'Rahilly, Michael Scott.

50. Alexandra Slaby, *L'État et la culture en Irlande*, p. 45.

“Shamrock” Pavilion for the New York World’s Fair in 1939, which was in itself a diplomatic statement since Ireland had insisted on having its own pavilion and not being grouped with other dominions in the British pavilion.⁵¹

Besides, in addition to choosing a diplomat as secretary to the Committee – a task delegated to Sheila Murphy⁵² – some members had diplomatic experience. Senator McCartan had been appointed Sinn Féin representative in the United States by the First Dáil, George Gavan Duffy had been minister for Foreign Affairs from January to July 1922 and Josephine McNeill would become ambassador to the Netherlands in November 1949 – a quite exceptional position at the time since the only other woman at ambassadorial level was Clare Boothe Luce, then US ambassador to Italy.⁵³

Yet, although Stanislas Ostrorog was pleased to note the presence of figures like George Gavan Duffy and Thomas MacGreevy, hand-picked by MacBride for their affinities with France as well as their many achievements,⁵⁴ it soon appears that some members may have been appointed to serve a political agenda. In a letter sent to *The Irish Times* in February 1949, journalist and TV presenter Brian Inglis noted that one third of the members on the Committee had been connected with MacBride’s party – Patrick McCartan, Josephine McNeill, Richard “Mac” O’Rahilly were all active members of Clann na Poblachta⁵⁵ – and warned that such practices on the part of a state that readily calls out political “rigging” in Northern Ireland, may not contribute to a *rapprochement* with the North.⁵⁶

51. John Gibney, Michael Kennedy, Kate O’Malley, *Ireland: A Voice among the Nations*, p. 82.

52. Along with Joseph Walshe, Frederick Boland and Michael Rynne, Sheila Murphy formed the small and influential group of officials of the Department of External Affairs who advised de Valera during his years as minister and president of the Executive Council: “These four were the Department at headquarters, under de Valera, for all those years. The rest of us were out of the loop, as far as matters considered of importance were concerned” (Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Memoir: My Life and Themes*, Dublin, Poolbeg Press, 1998, p. 133). First secretary in the Cultural Relations Division from 1949 to 1951, Sheila Murphy would go on to have an illustrious career in the Irish foreign service.

53. John Gibney, Michael Kennedy, Kate O’Malley, *Ireland: A Voice among the Nations*, p. 123.

54. “*Nous avons des amis dans la place. Le Ministre avait bien voulu me le signaler, en m’annonçant par avance la désignation du Président Gavan Duffy et de M. MacGreevy. La connaissance qu’ils ont de la France, l’amour qu’ils lui ont toujours témoigné sont une sûre garantie du sens dans lequel s’exercera leur action. C’est une des raisons qui a fixé sur eux le choix de M. MacBride*” (“Création d’un Comité Culturel en Irlande...”, 31 January 1949).

55. Founded in 1946, Clann na Poblachta, “brought together old Republicans, anti-Partitionists, socialists and dissident members of Fianna Fáil in what has been called a ‘negative consensus’: a powerful IRA clique dominated their inner councils” (Roy F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* [1988], London, Penguin, 1989, p. 565). Josephine McNeill, Patrick McCartan and “The O’Rahilly” were all founding members of Clann na Poblachta, and the latter also served as treasurer of the party.

56. “[The] committee’s work will be looked upon in other countries as being representative. We can surely demand that the committee should be set up in consultation with the various cultural bodies in this country – if not elected by them. At the very least we could ask that there should be no possible ground for suspicion that the committee is in any way political. It has not excepted the notice of the opponents of the present Government that more than a third of the committee have been closely connected with the party of which the minister for External Affairs is the leader. Nobody would suggest that he, or they, would allow that to influence their work on the committee; but I would suggest that we, who are also free with our accusations of political ‘rigging’ in the

Indeed, whether the six Northern Counties should be represented is a point that is raised in the Ministry files, and the final composition of the committee is also suggestive of an attempt to reach out to the North: Séamus Ó Duilearga and Patrick McCartan were two nationalist figures respectively born and raised in County Antrim and County Tyrone. Trinity College Dublin – which was considered a Protestant institution – was also represented through the presence of T. W. Moody, the leading historian who spearheaded the revisionist movement in the 1930s. This feature of the Committee actually exemplifies one strand of the propaganda strategy of Ireland's Department of External Affairs at the time, which consisted in repeating that a key tenet of Irish republicanism was the distinction between "Irish nationality" and "religion". By including representatives of Catholic and Protestant institutions, the composition of the Cultural Relations Committee gave the lie to the notion, long used to justify Britain's territorial claims over Northern Ireland, that the undue influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland's state matters would cause the interest of the Protestant population of Northern Ireland to be inadequately represented, should Ireland be reunited.⁵⁷ As Conor Cruise O'Brien would remind his colleagues "this line [was] the only line along which [Ireland could] hope for a peaceful re-integration of the whole of Ireland".⁵⁸ Interestingly, contrary to Rynne's predictions, no member of the religious orders was appointed to the Committee. The role of morality gate-keeper was probably well fulfilled by Richard Hayes, film censor between 1941 and 1954.

The absence of certain intellectuals on the Committee is also in itself very telling. Brian Inglis remarked on the absence of writers such as Frank O'Connor or Seán O'Faoláin and of personalities like Micheál Mac Liammóir, actor and founder of the more *avant-garde* Gate Theatre in Dublin in 1928, to represent the stage.⁵⁹ This confirms the observations made by Conor Cruise O'Brien who also had a great interest in literature. In an earlier note penned in August 1947, he already observed "that the list of potential members of the Committee [was] 'defective' on the literary side" as it included no practicing writers of distinction.

Austin Clarke, Frank O'Connor, Seán O'Faoláin and Peadar O'Donnell are the leading Irish writers who still retain an Irish domicile and continue to write. Any cultural committee who did not include one of these names would have something unreal about it – and the unreality would be particularly apparent from abroad and among precisely that "intelligentsia" whom we are trying to influence.⁶⁰

North, should not give the North any possible excuse to retaliate in kind" (Brian Inglis, "Letter to the Editor of *the Irish Times*", 3 February 1949, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29).

57. "Extract from the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet 'Note Verbal: Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland: Proposed appointment of the most Reverend Monsignor Ettore Felici' (GC 5/114 (Item 4) (S5954/A)", Dublin, 4 August 1949, in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. IX, p. 426.
58. "Minute from Conor Cruise O'Brien to Sean Nunan and Timothy O'Driscoll (Dublin) on 19 February 1951", in *Documents on Irish Foreign Policy*, vol. IX, p. 638-639.
59. Brian Inglis, "Letter to the Editor of *the Irish Times*", 3 February 1949.
60. Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Memorandum on the proposed membership of the cultural relations advisory committee", 1 August 1947, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29.

The omission of some of Ireland's leading artists of the time was perhaps justified by the necessity to avoid "live wires" – as Michael Rynne called them: "presumably no one wants a Committee of extremists whether of the active type, who might come into conflict with the Department's policies, nor of the senile type which would prove a sheer dead weight".⁶¹ Seán O'Faoláin, who was an influential, well-travelled intellectual with a cosmopolitan outlook but who had, since the beginning of his career in the 1930s, been highly critical of the political class and the Catholic Church in particular must certainly have been one of those "live wires of the extremist type". In this respect, one also notes that the Ministry did not seek the assistance of exiled Irish writers, like Samuel Beckett or Liam O'Flaherty to develop cultural relations. However, another sensible reason put forward by Valentin Iremonger was that these "first-class artists" would not have been effective members of the committee as they would have been too focused on their creative work: "What is needed on the Committee is a band of people who are 'interested in' culture rather than the top rank of creative workers".⁶²

Examining the output of the early years of the Committee: tangible results?

Between January 1949 and March 1950, the Committee held twenty-six meetings and five sub-committees were appointed to work on "fine arts", music, literature, films, and "visual publicity".⁶³ Although it operated with a limited budget of £10,000,⁶⁴ the Committee was nonetheless very active in developing cultural relations and promoting Ireland's cultural heritage and contemporary artists.

In 1950, partnering with local Irish studies centres, the Committee organised an exhibition of contemporary Irish art in North America and a series of lectures on Irish art and literature. The Committee also prepared a series of photographic exhibitions "designed as a general survey of present-day Ireland" and "depicting the Irish scene and the social life of our people"⁶⁵ for audiences in the United States, in Australia, and in Europe to act as a resource for cultural and business presentations abroad. In its initial years, the Committee focused on countries with important Irish communities, suggesting the premise of what is now known as diaspora strategy. Yet, it also promoted Ireland's culture outside of the anglosphere countries. The Committee financed the publication of two issues of *Études celtiques* the journal edited by French Celtic scholar Joseph Vendryès. While returning from the Folk

61. "Minute from Michael Rynne to Cornelius C. Cremin", 25 June 1947.

62. Valentin Iremonger, "Memorandum", 2 August 1947.

63. "First Annual Report on the Activities of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Relations, January 1949-March 1950", NAI, DFA, 366/40/29.

64. In comparison, the Swedish institute for Cultural Relations set up in 1945 by Royal Decree had a budget of £31,000 for the year 1947. See "Cultural Propaganda Organisations in Great Britain and Sweden", 19 March 1947, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29.

65. "First Annual Report...".

Music Congress and Festival held in Venice in September 1949, the group of performers representing Ireland gave a concert on French radio. There are many such examples of cultural exchanges and cooperation.

The production of a short documentary film on W. B. Yeats by the National Film Institute and the commissioning of the photographic reproduction in twenty copies of the Book of Kells⁶⁶ "for presentation to foreign government and libraries"⁶⁷ at a cost of £2,000, one-fifth of its annual budget, are also noteworthy achievements.

Yet, one of its most remarkable projects, perhaps, was the edition of a series of short booklets: the "Irish Life and Culture" series.⁶⁸ Written by experts in their fields, the studies aimed to "give a broad, vivid and informed survey of Irish life and culture, past and present"⁶⁹ and enjoyed very positive reviews in academic periodicals and the Irish daily press.

By exploring topics like *Irish Folk Music and Song*, *Irish Classical Poetry*, *Early Irish Society*, *The Fortunes of the Irish Language*, *Saga and Myth in ancient Ireland*, or *The Ossianic Lore and Romantic Tales of Medieval Ireland*, several booklets place a clear emphasis on Ireland's Celtic heritage.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the French diplomats measured the importance of showing Ireland it had a keen interest in this aspect of its culture. The selection of an academic to replace Roger Chauviré, who had held the chair of French at University College Dublin from 1918 to 1948, was a matter of prime importance and Ostrorog reminded that it was because the Germans had shown such an interest in Celtic studies that they had attracted a substantial number of Irish students to their universities before the war.⁷⁰ The French envoy thus also recommended supporting the publication of Chauviré's recent study and translation of the Ossianic Cycle of Irish Mythology and the reedition of his translation of the Ulster Cycle.⁷¹ This publication, Ostrorog argued, would be a great opportunity in terms of "French propaganda" as what "they like over here is not being exposed to French ideas as much as having the pleasant surprise to discover that France showed an interest in all things Irish".⁷² Ostrorog's awareness of the benefit this publication would represent for France and Ireland shows the level of reciprocity in Franco-Irish

66. As *The Longford Reader* noted: "The Book of Kells is Ireland's priceless link with its cultured past. But, too few people both in this and other countries are aware of its magnificence. For many a year it has rested in splendid isolation among the impressive tomes of Trinity College Dublin – scarcely an appropriate home for an emblem of pre-Plantation Ireland" ("Culture and Cash", *The Longford Reader*, 15 July 1950, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29).

67. "First Annual Report..."

68. Published for the Cultural Relations Committee of Ireland by Colm Ó Lochlainn's The Three Candles Press.

69. "First Annual Report..."

70. "Désignation d'un professeur celtisant pour l'université de Dublin...", 22 February 1949.

71. *La geste de la Branche Rouge ou l'Iliade irlandaise*, Roger Chauviré (ed.), Paris, Librairie de France, 1926; *Contes ossianiques*, Roger Chauviré (ed.), Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1949.

72. "Publication d'un ouvrage du Professeur Chauviré – Lettre de M. Ostrorog, Ministre de France en Irlande à Robert Schuman, Ministre des Affaires étrangères", 28 May 1947, Archives diplomatiques françaises, FR MAE 191 QO 15.

cultural relations and the part academics played in fostering exchanges. French art historian and archaeologist Françoise Henry, who had joined the department of French of University College Dublin in 1932, contributed four books on early Christian Irish art as part of the “Irish Life and Culture” series.

However, the first two volumes of this series, *Theatre in Ireland* written by Micheál Mac Liammóir, and *Poetry in Modern Ireland* by Austin Clarke, also reflect the Committee’s focus on Anglo-Irish literature to promote Ireland’s culture while associating artists who had been considered for membership of the Committee but had not been selected. Indeed, significantly, Micheál Mac Liammóir acknowledged in the opening lines of his study the “slow transforming character and expression [of Ireland] from a Gaelic to an Anglo-Irish nation” that took place in the 18th and 19th century, as well as the possibility for Ireland to assert its singularity through the re-appropriation of the English language:

And it was just then, with Molière still echoing in the European memory, that the Irish invasion of London began, Swift and Congreve to begin the assault on pulpit and stage, and later with such nicely contrasted figures as Sheridan and Goldsmith to take possession of theatres and set the audience on a roar. For as these gentlemen looked about them at the English life they were to portray with such gusto in their *Ways of the World* and their *Schools for Scandals*, they saw everything with eyes that were at once familiar and foreign, and that perhaps was why they gave to England a new kind of laughter, as she glanced into the mirror they held up to her face and saw her own image reflected there a little strangely. She listened, too, to her own speech on their lips and found it all oddly and amusingly different, heard her own unquestioned traditions turned inside out, and noticed with delight their freakish oddity through the impudent spectacles of these half alien jesters.⁷³

This statement underlines the complexity of Ireland’s identity with which some senior diplomats were still struggling. While some feared that Anglo-Irish literature might be interpreted abroad as “a sign of Ireland’s apparent domination by England”,⁷⁴ Mac Liammóir’s assertion that modern Ireland’s postcolonial identity lay in its singular use of the English language was just as essential as celebrating its Gaelic past.

Conclusion

MacBride’s term as minister for External Affairs bears the hallmark of the “sore thumb” policy. He overestimated the strategic value Ireland might represent for

73. Micheál Mac Liammóir, *Theatre in Ireland*, Dublin, The Three Candles Press (Irish Life and Culture), 1950, p. 6.

74. “Anglo-Irish literature acts as a prop, although admittedly a weak one, to our nationalism. Abroad, however, it is a sign of Ireland’s apparent domination by England except in certain political matters” (résumé of article by “Beann Mhadagáin”, *Gaelic Weekly*, 20 April 1951, NAI, DFA, 366/40/29).

the allies in the context of the Cold War and his attempts to leverage support for the ending of partition left Ireland outside of the main international organisations such as NATO or the United Nations. In contrast, the setting up of the Cultural Relations Committee, three years before the inauguration of the Arts Council in January 1952 represents a long-lasting achievement of his mandate.

The correspondence between diplomats and journalists has revealed the highly political dimension underlying the creation of this body, as well as the conflicting views regarding what culture should encompass. MacBride's decision to opt for the creation of an entity distinct from – if not quite independent of – the Department was thus another decisive move as it allowed for participation by a broader spectrum of intellectuals and artists in the dissemination of Ireland's culture.

Further analysis is required to examine in greater depth the image of Ireland that emerged from the entire work of the Cultural Relations Committee over several decades. However, the contribution of intellectuals as diverse in outlook as Micheál Mac Liammóir, T. W. Moody or Daniel Corkery, suggests that the Committee enjoyed sufficient editorial independence to give readers abroad a balanced representation of the intellectual debates taking place in Ireland at the time as well as giving voice to the coexistence of the competing narratives on Gaelic and Anglo-Irish identities in Ireland.

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